


GW HATCHET
GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
7 April 1986



*Larger
than*
LIFE

The
CIA

It takes more
than just central
intelligence to
pass the rigors
of a CIA interview
... and less than
that to want to

The Central Intelligence Agency: spying, James Bond, pen cameras, bullet proof cars, Langley, information-gathering, intrigue. All of these thoughts race through the heads of every student who heeds the call for government service and applies for an interview with the CIA through GW's Office of Career Services.

TURN TO PAGES

Text
by
John
Kiriakou

The GW Hatchet Features Magazine



The interview is a grueling ordeal

At one time or another, we all envision ourselves as superpatriots, stealing Soviet secrets, single-handedly liberating American hostages in the finest of Rambo fashions, and working under assumed names in the most glamorous of U.S. Western European embassies. So you spend the \$20 to open up a Career Services credentials file and apply for an interview.

If you're lucky enough, you get your first choice interview time. Next, you press your best suit, purchase a Nixonesque white shirt and a red necktie, or a silk blouse and low-heeled pumps. After all, you want to look as American as possible. The initial interview lasts about one half hour. The interviewers are analysts based at the Agency's Langley, Virginia headquarters.

Your resumes have been reviewed, so they already know what languages you speak, what your areas of concentrations are, and everything else you volunteered to tell them. After a brief discussion about your qualifications, plans for the future, and interests, the interviewer asks if you have any questions.

They love it if you ask them if they like their jobs. It gives them a chance to tell you how quickly they have risen to two levels above "Top Secret." They also like to talk about how they're helping the country, national security, blah, blah, blah. The Agency offers unbeatable educational benefits (namely free education in your field of expertise), a good opportunity for advancement, and the potential for a lifetime career. You'll find out about the Agency's new wing being built at headquarters, the different opportunities for recent graduates to go overseas for either the short or long term. You'll hear a little about how "real spies" operate (and they don't hesitate to use the word "spies").

You begin to feel important. Maybe a job after graduation won't be so hard after all. You take your application home.

The application to apply for employment with the Central Intelligence Agency is book-length. "Have you ever gotten high? On

'Have you ever gotten high? On what? With whom? Where? When? Why?' And they want exact names, dates and places. In the interview they'll tell you, (well, some of you) 'Don't lie to us because we'll find the residue sitting in your testicles during the physical exam anyway.'

what? With whom? Where? When? Why?" And they want exact names, dates, and places. In the interview, they'll tell you, (well, some of you) "Don't lie to us because we'll find the residue sitting in your testicles during the physical exam, anyway." They also want to know your drinking habits. "Where do you drink? What do you drink? How much? How often? Ever tried coke? LSD?" The list goes on. They want to know if you've ever been caught speeding, if you have any outstanding parking tickets, if you've ever been reported for disturbing the peace, if you've ever been involved in any protests. "What kind of a protest was it? Have you ever been out of the country? Have you ever been to Eastern Europe or China? Why?" You must list all relatives living abroad, how often you see them, how often you talk to them, how close you are to them. (Close

enough to sell state secrets?)

You're doing well so far, so they invite you to Ross Hall for a full Saturday of testing. They explain to you that these tests are simply to gauge what your interests are and how you may best help the Agency. The testing takes a full eight hours and is full of questions like, "Would you rather fix a radio or write a piano concerto?" According to one analyst who was at the testing, the tests are also used to see who can sit still and wrack their brains for eight hours, as well as to see who can stand up to a little pressure.

You're still doing well, so you get a letter asking you to report for a complete physical—and they mean complete! The CIA tests for everything from hangnails to cancer to marijuana residue in your body as well as smoke in your lungs. Very few people pass the drug questions/tests, which don't carry as much weight as they did five or 10 years ago, when an affirmative answer or test result meant almost automatic expulsion from the process. Both the first interviewer and the doctor said that if the Agency rejected everybody who has ever tried marijuana once in their lifetime, there would be no Agency at all. If you pass the physical exam and haven't lied about something on your application, you are asked to move on to the security check.

"No problem," I said to the interviewer. "I have a friend who had to do this over at State." "State? State is small potatoes. We mean business at Langley," he said quietly. Business may even mean calling your second grade teacher, high school sweetheart, neighbors, and past employers, as well as checking with the FBI to see if you've ever been to a Pete Seeger concert or if you voted for George McGovern in 1972.

One person told me that the CIA had gotten a transcript of her statements following an auto accident. As she was being carried into the ambulance, she said, "Where's my shoe." How could they have possibly known that? If you've ever been arrested

for anything, you're automatically withdrawn from the process. One graduate student whom I spoke with was withdrawn from the process for having been arrested in the 12th grade for protesting nuclear weapons in a small town in upstate New York. No formal charges had ever been filed, but there was a record of an arrest, so he was dropped.

You have now been in the process for about two months. If you are lucky enough (and clean enough) to have gotten this far, you may now look forward to a financial audit. Not bad, you say? You aren't the only one being audited. Your roommates, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and even your grandparents are checked out. Why? If you have an uncle who owes Big Rocko Scagliana \$50,000, you might be tempted to sell a few satellite coordinates to the Chinese. That's reasonable, but the hard part is yet to come.

You have finally arrived at the final phase. It consists of two five-hour sessions with a polygraph machine, or a lie detector. The first session is strictly about your personal life. Once again, you are asked the drug and alcohol questions from the first application, as well as the questions about arrests, traffic violations, and so on. You are also asked about your political beliefs and ideology. They want you to tell them your weight, age, hair color, eye color, and other obvious questions in order to help you relax.

These easy questions lead up to things like, "Do you beat your girlfriend?" "Do you gamble?" and finally, "Have you ever had intercourse with a member of the same sex?" The CIA's justification for these questions is that if you have some deeply hidden secret, you have to quit the process. The scenario the CIA fears is having an agent in a room with a KGB man, and the Russian saying, "Give us those missile

locations or we'll tell your mother that you're gay." Believe it or not, this happens.

By the end of the semester, you are offered a job at the Central Intelligence Agency, provided that you have passed all of the tests. It is at this point that the Agency gives you the final four rules. Rule number one: If you are a first or second generation American, meaning an American citizen whose parents or grandparents came here from another country, you can never rise to the top security clearance

because you will always be considered a security threat. In other words, no matter how pro-American you may be, the U.S. government fears that you will maintain at least some sentimental loyalty to another country.

Rule number two: You may not leave the United States without the permission of the Agency—even for a vacation. The rationale

is that this is for your own protection, as you may be a target for kidnapping or assassination.

Rule number three: You may never travel to Eastern Europe,

the Soviet Union, or China. Ever. It is a sacrifice some people are not prepared to make for the rest of their lives. But as one CIA analyst said, "This, too is for your own protection. There's no way that we can watch you once you get over there. And there's no telling what the commies are going to do to you."

Rule number four: You may not return to the country or countries of your ancestors (if you are less than a third generation American), even to see family members, or just on a vacation. In addition, you are asked to limit your contact with family members

living overseas. This reduces the chance of an accidental slip of classified material to a foreign national or an American with close foreign ties.

There is another negative aspect to a career in the intelligence community. While some instructors at both GW and other universities around the country have done some limited work for the CIA, no credible American university would hire a former

operative as a full-time professor or lecturer. The reason for this is that that professor would have to submit his or her lecture notes to the Agency prior to each lecture in order to obtain approval. This supposedly safeguards the professor and the Agency from any accidental releases of classified information. This information comes from three different GW professors who have all had experience with the CIA in one way or another.

If you are an eager, young, intelligent superpatriot, the American intelligence community may be for you.

If you hope to see the world someday on your own, have close family abroad, are unsure of your future plans, or plan to pursue a career in academia, stay away from the CIA. As one operative recently said, "You can quit, but you can never leave."

